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## ECONOMIC NEEDS OF THE SOUTH

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Just before his death, the late Edward Atkinson, one of the frankest and most helpful critics of the South, wrote to the "Manufacturer's Record," a letter which might be taken as a text in discussions of ways and means for the economic development of the southern states.<sup>1</sup> In the course of that letter, he deprecated what he thought to be undue emphasis that had been placed on the promotion of the cotton manufacture in the South, and urged the more pressing need of an improved agriculture. His words were:

While you have poured capital, both southern and northern, into great factories and iron works, have you not neglected the very foundation of your prosperity, that is, agriculture? Have you yet surmounted the evil methods of the old system? What part even of your cotton land has been subjected to deep and thorough tillage, to renovation, to intelligent and intensive cultivation? To what extent have you increased the old meagre crop per acre of an average of 200 to 225 pounds, and on the uplands even less, when in point of fact, if intelligent and intensive methods are applied, with right tillage and renovation of the soil, double that crop can be made on every acre, with less labor and under better conditions? Is not that work being done by a small number of intelligent white farmers and a yet smaller number of intelligent colored farmers, yet sufficient in number to prove the general shiftlessness of all the rest?

This severe arraignment of southern agricultural methods has been in substance confirmed by intelligent observers and writers of that section of the country. The South has suffered both from a too exclusive dependence on the main money crops, and from a failure

<sup>1</sup>Edward Atkinson died suddenly on December 11, 1905. On that very day the "Manufacturer's Record" received from him a letter dated December 8th. He had been asked to express his judgment as to the course of that paper in its efforts to promote the development of the South. His reply was not the indiscriminate praise common on such an occasion, but rather frank and suggestive criticism. The circumstances render especially striking this last message from one who had always shown a keen interest in southern affairs. See "Manufacturer's Record" (Baltimore, Md.), December 28, 1905, p. 619.

to apply progressive methods to the cultivation of these crops. Supplies for man, and food for the live stock, which might have been raised at home, have been purchased from abroad at high prices. Failure of the main crops, or unfavorable prices in the markets, have been all the more disastrous because of a neglect of numerous minor crops which might have been exceedingly profitable. The great staple products have very frequently been cultivated in a wasteful and unprogressive manner. Take cotton, the most important of all, as an illustration. For a long time the cotton seed was considered of little use, and often thrown away. Then its value for oil and as a fertilizer became known. But cotton-seed meal, a most valuable cattle feed, is to-day used in large quantities as a fertilizer, when it might first be fed to cattle and three-fourths of its fertilizing value still be obtained in the manure from the animals. Millions of dollars in animal feeding values are being wasted annually in using cotton-seed meal as a fertilizer.<sup>2</sup>

Again there has been a lack of attention to seed selection in the cultivation of the cotton crop. Seed taken at random from the gin cannot produce the best results. As a result of actual tests, it is asserted that by a proper selection of seed during a ten-year period the average yield per acre could be increased twenty-five per cent. Another failure is the lack of a proper system of rotation, including leguminous crops such as the cowpea. This would supply abundant nitrogen to the soil. As it is, great expenditures are incurred for nitrogenous fertilizers which might readily be saved. Other improvements are needed in ginning, baling, and handling the cotton.

In recent years, however, earnest efforts have been made to better southern agricultural conditions, and encouraging progress has been achieved. Agricultural experiment stations have conducted important investigations, and the agricultural press has been especially valuable in interpreting the results of such investigations to the actual farmers, and in conducting a systematic agitation for an agricultural revolution in the South. This agricultural revolution is a great and fundamental need of the day. Most helpful in bringing it about has been the coöperative demonstration work organized among the farmers of many localities of the South

<sup>2</sup>See article by Charles H. Poe on "Enormous Leaks in Our Cotton Farming," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, April, 1906, p. 128.

by Mr. S. A. Knapp under the auspices of the United States Department of Agriculture. Great good has been done by Mr. Knapp and his associates through the process of teaching by example. The most progressive farmers in a locality are selected, and the representatives of the government undertake to teach better methods by working along with them on their own land. Success under such conditions makes the selected farms powerful object lessons for the raising of the standard of agricultural methods in whole communities.

Mr. Knapp has proposed that the same methods be applied to agricultural instruction in the schools. He does not think that agriculture can be acquired from text books or object lessons. These may be illustrative and helpful, but so far as practical results are to be attained, learning must be by doing. Much has been said recently in favor of the introduction of agriculture into the curriculum of the secondary schools. To be of value, Mr. Knapp maintains that such instruction must put the stress on the cultivation of small fields by the pupils themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Besides the introduction of better methods in the growing of the staple products, another need of southern agriculture is the development of profitable minor crops. Here again encouraging progress has of late been made. Take a few illustrations from the single State of North Carolina. It has been discovered that tracts of land in eastern North Carolina, which were formerly considered of little value, are admirably adapted to the raising of early vegetables and fruits for the northern markets. Around Fayetteville, N. C., has grown up an important lettuce growing industry. The lands in that vicinity along the upper Cape Fear River are said to be especially well adapted to this plant. They also have the further advantage of being midway between the semi-tropical region of the far South, where the crop comes very early, and the colder trucking sections farther north, where the season is much later. The North Carolina growers are able to possess the market in the intervening period. Lettuce growing means the intensive cultivation of comparatively small tracts of ground, and a net profit of from \$800 to \$1,000 an acre is frequently made.

<sup>3</sup>S. A. Knapp, "The Study of Agriculture in the Secondary Schools," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, April, 1907, p. 135.

While the lettuce crop does best on loamy soils, a use has been found for the dry, sandy soils of eastern North Carolina. Unproductive sand plains are being turned into blooming berry fields. Here the dewberry thrives and yields a profitable return to the grower. Sixty crates to the acre is a good yield, with the price varying from \$3.20 to \$4.80 a crate.<sup>4</sup>

Earlier than the dewberry crop is the North Carolina strawberry crop. This has brought prosperity to the territory around Chadbourn, in Columbus County. Fifteen years ago this section was regarded as one of the poorest in North Carolina. It was undeveloped, and the people had devoted their time chiefly to the turpentine and lumber business. Strawberry growing was commenced in 1897, and 600 crates were shipped that year. The business has grown so that in the last five years 1,144,000 crates were shipped from the Chadbourn territory, and the Columbus County growers received for their berries during that period a total of about \$2,500,000. In 1909 the growers received about \$700,000.<sup>5</sup>

These illustrations drawn from a part of one state are typical of what is going on in many localities all over the South. Mention might be made of the increasing apple orchards of western North Carolina, of the peach and melon production of Georgia, of the varied vegetable and fruit production of late developed in Florida, of the onions of Texas and so on. As important money crops, practically all these have either sprung into existence or reached a more than local market in recent years.

Closely connected with the problem of agricultural development is the need of good roads over which the planter can take his crops to the local market or to the place of shipment. Here active and organized work is being done. Many southern counties have already built most creditable systems of roads. The North Carolina legislature of 1909 passed one hundred and thirty-one acts relating in some way or other to public roads. Eighteen of these acts related to the issue of bonds by various counties and townships for the construction of better roads. Fifteen were concerned with the levying of special taxes for the purpose of road building. In some

<sup>4</sup>See article by Rev. Thomas A. Smoot on "Some New North Carolina Industries" in the *South Atlantic Quarterly*, October, 1905, p. 325.

<sup>5</sup>Speech of State Senator Joseph A. Brown in the "News and Observer," Raleigh, N. C., October 3, 1909.

cases the bonds or special taxes have been authorized; in others progressive public sentiment was not yet strong enough to carry the election. However, such gatherings as the recent Southern Appalachian Good Roads Convention at Asheville, in which several states were represented and many influential men participated, give promise that the friends of good roads are to carry on an aggressive educational campaign.

Turning from agricultural development to that of manufactures, it is worth while to note the views expressed in the letter of Edward Atkinson to which reference has previously been made. He argued that the South has placed undue emphasis upon the development of cotton manufacturing and said that "the progress and welfare of a state would be vastly more promoted by developing the small industries that require little capital, that call for mechanical aptitude and intelligence, than by establishing great factories of any kind." In criticizing the course of the "Manufacturer's Record," which has shared with many southerners the idea of bringing the whole cotton manufacturing business to the southern states, Mr. Atkinson said:

The inducements held out were long hours, low wages, to a certain extent child labor, proximity to the cotton field and a warm climate—all in some measure a disadvantage rather than an advantage. In the course of time all this has become apparent. It has been proved that long hours, especially night work, are unprofitable on modern high-speed machinery. The most intelligent and progressive cotton manufacturers are now keeping children out of their mills and providing them with education. Proximity to the cotton field, where the cotton mills exist, has proved to be a delusion after the coarse work had been passed by to fine work requiring strong cotton. The supply is drawn from the same sources supplying New England; there is no advantage in proximity. The mills have been constructed so rapidly that the source of labor is exhausted, and there is no French Canada or volume of immigration to fall back upon. Wages are rising and help is very scarce.

. . . . .

There are 364 titles to the manufactures of the nation. How many of these are listed in the old cotton states, or rather, I should ask, how few? You can pick out certain cities in the South that have developed from within on their own muscle that are thriving on small industries. How soon will this come to be the rule and how soon will the deposits in your savings banks, belonging to the intelligent mechanics and artisans who work your small industries, begin to equal the deposits of the same class in the New

England states, in New York and Pennsylvania? My own reply would be, when your common schools and your common education have been brought nearer to the true standard, and the illiteracy of white and black alike has been overcome.

At present diversified manufacturing industries are more needed than additional cotton mills. Not that the cotton mill has failed to prove a blessing. It has been a large producer of wealth for the owner, and, with all its defects, it has clearly brought about a substantial advance in the condition of the class of people from which its operatives have been recruited. The enlightened self-interest of the most progressive of the manufacturers, stimulated and backed by an awakened public sentiment, is tending to remove the worst of its defects. Hours are being shortened, night labor is being abolished, and greater limitations are being placed upon the labor of children. There is also general recognition of the need of further progress along such lines. But, when all this has been said, it is nevertheless true that an almost exclusive reliance upon the fortunes of one or two large industries is not desirable. There are obvious advantages to those towns and cities which are built up on the basis of many and varied industries. In such towns business conditions are likely to be much more stable, and periods of depression will be less violently felt.

It is worthy of note, too, that the cotton mill industry has usually established its villages on the outskirts of towns or in the country. The isolation of mill workers from the social interests and advantage of a larger community life has been unfavorable to their development. It has tended to preserve a certain class or caste feeling which often keeps the cotton mill operatives apart from sympathetic and helpful relations with other citizens. Such a class isolation is not so likely to exist among the workmen of smaller and varied industries, who do not ordinarily live together in the monotony and segregation of the average mill village. The merging of the various classes of workmen in the general life of the community seems more favorable to the development of intelligence, enterprise and usefulness as citizens.

Other needs of great economic importance to the South are the improvement of the public health and the betterment of public educational facilities. Dr. Charles W. Stiles has shown that in all probability the shiftlessness commonly attributed to a large por-

tion of the labor force of the South is due to the ravages of the so-called "hookworm disease." If but a fraction of the damage, inefficiency, and suffering charged to this intestinal parasite is conceded to be caused by it, the eradication of the disease would be a work of the highest economic consequence and importance to the South. Mr. John D. Rockefeller's recently announced gift of \$1,000,000 to be used under the direction of an able commission in a systematic campaign against this disease is a striking example of wise public spirit and humane regard for the welfare of untold numbers of the unfortunate. Other progressive efforts are needed in behalf of sanitary improvement in both city and country. Such work is distinctly on the increase in recent years. It is encouraging to note activity in many states in the fight against tuberculosis and also the organization of forces to deal with the existence of the recently recognized pellagra.

In the extract which has been quoted from Edward Atkinson's letter, a better standard of education was truly set forth as the fundamental need of the South. Much has been done in the last ten years. But the proportion of children of school age not in the schools is still large. The mills and factories often take the children before they have had sufficient school opportunities. This is frequently due to the unwise haste of their parents to put them at work. In many of the poorer communities public sentiment will not yet grant sufficient taxes to maintain good schools for a term of reasonable length. But the whole tendency of the times is forward. Greater wealth production will make better schools possible, and increasing intelligence of the masses of the people will aid the success of every movement under way for the economic development of the South.